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R14.4bn needed to train artisans

Jul 22 2008 12:26PM

Johannesburg - It will cost about R14.4bn over the next three years to train the 120 000 artisans needed by South African industries to meet growing demand, Landelahni Business Leaders said on Tuesday.

This means that the shortfall between the skills development levy and the artisan training tab will have to be picked up primarily by the private sector.

In its latest mining survey, the black-owned and women-owned executive search company said the cost of training enough artisans to meet the skills demand is R14.4bn over the next three years while the South African skills levy only brings in R6bn a year.

Companies operating in South Africa are required to pay a skills levy, which is equivalent of 1% of their annual payroll.

Landelahni Business Leaders CEO Sandra Burmeister said some 50 000 artisans are required over the next three years based on the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (Jipsa) estimation that at least 12 500 artisans should be produced each year to meet demand.

At a 42% pass rate, South Africa will need to train 120 000 artisans at an average cost of R120 000 over three years.

"This means that a significantly increased investment will be required by both the government and the private sector," said Burmeister.

What is more, the current artisan population is aging, with an average age of 50-55 years.

Severe shortage

"So we should not merely be training for current needs, but also to replace the ageing workforce," Burmeister said.

Landelahni said South Africa continues to suffer a severe shortage of qualified, competent and experienced artisans.

The number of artisans tested across all trades increased from 15 000 in 1970 to 26 500 in 1986, while those who passed trade tests increased from 6 000 to 13 500.

From 1986, however, the numbers tested dropped to 9 041, and those who passed dropped to a low 3 222 or 42%.

The Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA) target registration for artisans in 2008 is 1 766, against 1 034 actual registrations.

MQA targets for artisans in mining industry were among highest, next to construction and manufacturing.

But assuming an average pass rate of 42%, only 434 artisans would be trained each year under MQA auspices with specific qualifications in mining, said Burmeister.

- I-Net Bridge

